παγὰ δακρύων 851). Since all Greek springs were worshiped under the name of Achelous, and the hydra is described as a shimmering snake (αἰόλος δράκων 834), which was one of the forms taken by Achelous when he courted Deianeira (αἰόλος δράκων ἑλικτός 11-12), the catastrophe seems to represent an ultimate victory of Achelous over Heracles and Deianeira.[40]

CHAPTER FIVE

Things Pitiful to See

I The Nurse reports that Deianeira is dead, 863-899.

The little scene between the Chorus and the Nurse plays out questions of speech and silence, interpretation and intention, and significant and insignificant sound, which come to the fore as the drama's confusion escalates. Hearing an inarticulate cry (ἠχεῖ 866) from within the house, the Chorus conjectures that it is lamentation (οἴκτου 864, κωκυτόν 867). Even an inarticulate sound, therefore, can have significance (οὐκ ἄσημον 866), and so for that matter may silence, as the Nurse's appearance shows (σημαίνουσα 870).[1]

The Nurse is in fact temporarily unable to communicate by normal speech, though she makes herself understood nevertheless. Having first shrieked, and then made signs to the Chorus, when she finally speaks she can only do so in elliptical enigmas:

> ὦ παῖδες, ὡς ἄρ' ἡμὶν οὐ σμικρῶν κακῶν
> ἦρξεν τὸ δῶρον Ἡρακλεῖ τὸ πόμπιμον. (871-872)
>
> O children, indeed the gift sent to Heracles set in motion great evils for us.
>
> βέβηκε Δηάνειρα τὴν παυστάτην
> ὁδῶν ἁπασῶν ἐξ ἀκινήτου ποδός. (874-875)
>
> Deianeira has travelled the last of all journeys without stirring a foot.

The Nurse's horror at Deianeira's act seems to have transferred itself to speech about the act, so that she cannot put the deed into words. The Chorus figures out what has happened, but then they, and not the Nurse, are the source of the report (πάντ' ἀκήκοας 876, δεύτερον κλύεις 877). The opposition between speaker and listener breaks down as the apparent speaker, the Nurse, fails to give the information required but poses a riddle instead, so that the meaning comes from rather than to the listener.

When the Nurse finally can say that Deianeira has killed herself with a sword, the Chorus in disbelief (ὦ ματαία 887) asks whether she actually saw what she describes (ἐπεῖδες 887).[2] As usual they regard visual observation as the only reliable source of knowledge. The Nurse affirms that she did see, from a very short distance (ἐπεῖδες, ὡς . . . πλησία παραστάτις 889), indicating that her testimony can substitute for reality itself, since no gap between it and reality exists. Indeed her report can substitute so well for reality that it will qualify the Chorus as witnesses who can independently confirm it (πεύσῃ δ' ὥστε μαρτυρεῖν ἐμοί 899). By regarding the truth of the report as a given that allows the report to substitute for reality, its truth can then circularly be proved by demonstrating its fidelity to another version of itself, that to be heard by the Chorus.

II The Nurse's report, 900-946.

Seeing and truth

Even in its very first lines the Nurse's narrative reveals that it bears a problematic relationship to its referent. According to the Nurse Deianeira beheld Hyllus preparing a litter for Heracles when she entered the house (ἐπεὶ παρῆλθε δωμάτων εἴσω . . . καὶ παῖδ' ἐν αὐλαῖς εἶδε 900-901). Yet as T. Wilamowitz observed, Deianeira had entered the house before Hyllus (813-820).[3] The Nurse's narrative has therefore rearranged the events, perhaps in order to create a more dramatic impression on the Chorus, whose pity she hopes to arouse (897).

More peculiar still, although the Nurse in her narration predictably emphasizes her role as subject (ὁρῶ 912, ὁρῶ 915, ὁρῶμεν 930) and explains how she was able to see the scene in the bedroom (λαθραῖον ὄμμ' ἐπεσκιασμένη φρούρουν 914-915), she was not actually present at the time of the suicide, which is precisely what she told the Chorus she had seen. For when Deianeira had exposed herself the Nurse had instantly run away (927-928), and only when she returned with Hyllus (929) did she see Deianeira's

body with a sword in it (930-931). Thus she cannot positively affirm that Deianeira inflicted the blow on herself (αὐτὴν διῄστωσε 881) with her hand (χειροποιεῖται 891), a suicide even bolder than that of Ajax. Although nothing in particular casts doubt on this version, its rhetorical claim of epistemological certainty is utterly invalid. Moreover, it calls into question any claim of epistemological certainty based on visual observation, for the Nurse appears unaware of the difference between seeing and what she experienced. Visual observation, even undertaken with great care, remains beset by uncertainties that are resolved only by interpretation, which, in a manner like that in which Deianeira interpolated her interpretation of the oracle into its text, will tend then to be identified with observed reality, if observed reality is what visual observation is expected to furnish.

Even apart from the epistemic gaps in the Nurse's perception of what she has tried to see, questions arise concerning whether reality, as distinct from interpretation, was available to be seen. The Nurse's repeated insistence that she saw Deianeira's private moments, when she did not choose to be seen and did not know she was seen (κρύψασ' ἑαυτὴν ἔνθα μή τις εἰσίδοι 903, κἀγὼ λαθραῖον ὄμμ' ἐπεσκιασμένη φρούρουν 914-915) suggests that she has beheld reality as it is, without any embellishment to render it acceptable to the eyes of others. Indeed, the last thing that the Nurse sees before she runs for Hyllus is Deianeira unfastening her peplos and exposing her nude body (923-926). Yet if the Nurse hoped to see Deianeira completely free of language and unconscious of an audience, she was disappointed, for although in her bedroom she is apart from human society, she personifies the room and the bed themselves,[4] speaking to them as if they were others who could witness her fidelity to her wifely nature (915-922). Even her nudity may be rhetorical, since she implies that the bed in which she dies is that where she received the embraces of Heracles (εὐνάτριαν 922).[5] Certainly no practical purpose is served by removing her peplos, which would have afforded no protection against a sword.

If Deianeira's actions can be considered at all theatrical, it is reasonable to ask what they represent and for what purpose and audience they are staged. Deianeira's actions reveal her separation from her surroundings. When she enters the house she is alone (μόνη 900), and she sees her son making a litter for Heracles (901-902), an act which seems to symbolize her exclusion from the family, for the task should have been hers.[6] She hides herself (903) out of shame,[7] for as she had said (721-722), she can't bear the occurrence of a discrepancy between her nature and her reputation. Besides her family as persons and her good name, she is cut off (γένοιτ' ἐρήμη 905)[8] from the altar (904-905) which represents her family in its religious

dimension, and from the tools of her work (905-906). Her suffering intensifies when she touches these objects, perhaps because only then does she appreciate that they can be touched, and hence are outside of her. Homeless now she wanders about (στρωφωμένη 907). The sight of her servants, like the touch of her tools, prompts feelings of exclusion (908-909), as Kamerbeek notes, and reminds her in turn of her isolation from her children (ἄπαιδας οὐσίας 911). Finally she takes leave of her bedchamber, the locus of erotic love and reproduction.[9]

In thus interpreting the scene, however, we should not fail to take into account the fact that Deianeira is only an exile in Trachis, and that the house, bedchamber, probably the household equipment, and at least some of the servants (they are maidens of Trachis) are therefore not really hers.[10] Deianeira thus bewails her separation from that to which she was never really connected. The bedroom in particular is definitely not Deianeira's nuptial chamber (νυμφεῖ' ἐμά 920); indeed if Kamerbeek is right in suggesting that the adjective Ἡράκλειον (913) indicates that the bedroom was not hers, she may never have slept there at all. Unable to face the homelessness that has been her lot all along,[11] Deianeira must create a home in order to be separated from it.

Deianeira's lamentations, therefore, exhibit the same strategy of avoidance that we saw in her meditations on the Oechalian captives (293-313), Iole's putative love for Heracles (462-467), Heracles' infidelity (531-551), and the effect of the drug (663-670). In all these cases her avoidance is associated with pity, either that which she feels for others, that which she hopes for from others, or that which she feels for herself. It seems plausible that in this scene too Deianeira hopes to avoid her pain by objectifying it and feeling pity for herself. By creating a world to which she belongs, if only to enact her separation from it, she at least affirms her former unity with it and indeed herself as its creator. Her use of the sword, a weapon with obvious phallic symbolism,[12] suggests both masculinity[13] (and hence sexual dimorphism and self-sufficiency) and an internalization of violence that might otherwise come from without, for example from Hyllus,[14] who like Orestes might be expected to avenge his father. Her suicide does not destroy this world so much as protect it from change; that is why she cannot die with the bed unmade. Deianeira's suicide only puts into action the rhetoric of her opening speech, where she controlled the instability of her life by fashioning it into a unity that she defended against even the idea of a future (1-5).[15]

The feeling of pity also explains why the Nurse so stealthily watched Deianeira's lamentation but did nothing either to console her or prevent her suicide. The Nurse would like the Chorus to think that she spied on

Deianeira in order to protect her from harm, since she says that in watching she guarded Deianeira (φρούρουν 915) and that she exerted herself to the utmost (κἀγὼ δρομαία βᾶσ', ὅσονπερ ἔσθενον 927) to save her. Obviously though she would have helped more effectively by intervening sooner and more directly. But in watching Deianeira the Nurse was able to experience pity for her (κάρτ' ἂν ᾤκτισας 897), step out of her servile condition so far as to guard her mistress (φρούρουν 915), and command the ear of the Chorus as one possessing wisdom (943-946).

Causation

We have already noted how frequently the characters of the *Trachiniae* attribute or seem to attribute an event to a single cause, and how such attributions often conflict with one another and thus tacitly expose their own non-empirical, interpretive quality. For example, when the Nurse emerged from the house to report Deianeira's suicide she declared that the trouble started with Deianeira's gift, the robe (κακῶν ἦρξεν τὸ δῶρον Ἡρακλεῖ τὸ πόμπιμον 871-872); but at the end of the kommos the Chorus indicates that Iole gave birth to the disasters (ἔτεκε . . . ἅδε νύμφα . . . Ἐρινύν 893-895). The conclusion of the Nurse's speech furnishes another case of a too-simple causal narrative. Hyllus laments that he compelled Deianeira to commit suicide by blaming her for Heracles' death (ἔγνω . . . τοὔργον . . . ὡς ἐφάψειεν 932-933), but even before Hyllus' entrance Deianeira had blamed herself (μόνη . . . αὐτόν . . . ἐξαποφθερῶ 712-713) and determined to kill herself (κἀμὲ συνθανεῖν 720), rejecting the Chorus' tentative reassurances (723-730).

Tragedy and Achelous

The Nurse's speech, like that of Hyllus and the third stasimon, implies, no doubt without the speaker's intention, that the tragic catastrophe involves the outbreak of repressed, amorphous forces symbolized by water; for when Deianeira sits upon the bed she "bursts warm streams of tears" (δακρύων ῥήξασα θερμὰ νάματα 919). The suggestion that Deianeira's tears are a fountain (cf. ἔρρωγεν παγὰ δακρύων 851) points to Achelous, god of all πηγαῖον ὕδωρ.

III Fourth stasimon, 947-970.

Shocked by the successive reports of Hyllus and the Nurse, the Chorus is so overwhelmed by the calamities that have befallen Heracles and Deianeira that it cannot decide which is more excessive (περαιτέρω 948), both being complete (τέλεα 948). Jebb objects to the MSS. reading τέλεα "since the second calamity is still prospective,"[16] but in doing so he overlooks the attribution of completeness to the incomplete which persists throughout the play. Yet the Chorus undercuts the idea of completeness by also indicating that both calamities are excessive (περαιτέρω) and thus have already surpassed their bounds.

In attempting this comparison the Chorus equates that which has already happened and can be seen and therefore experienced with certainty (τάδε μὲν ἔχομεν ὁρᾶν 950), meaning the death of Deianeira, and that which they still await (τάδε δὲ μένομεν 951), the arrival and death of Heracles; when the future is certain it is virtually present (κοινὰ δ' ἔχειν τε καὶ μέλλειν 952). The certainty with which they await the death of Heracles allows the Chorus to erase the difference between present and future, seeing (ὁρᾶν 950) and expectation (ἐπ' ἐλπίσιν 951). But far from being in a position to elevate their expectation of Heracles' death to the same level as their sight of Deianeira's, they are not even able truthfully to say that they have seen Deianeira's death, since they know of it only through the Nurse's report. The division between the ἔργον of the visible and the λόγος of expectation indeed breaks down, not because both are ἔργα but because both are λόγοι.

In the second strophic pair the Chorus turns its thoughts to the imminent arrival of Heracles. They expect to see (εἰσιδοῦσ' 958) a marvel that cannot be put into words (ἄσπετόν τι θαῦμα 961) and whose presence therefore has and allows no mediation. So powerful is this presence that exposure to it may be fatal: the Chorus fears that it will be struck dead merely by seeing (μὴ . . . θάνοιμι μοῦνον εἰσιδοῦσ' 957-958). Since such a death would be caused precisely by presence, it would be instantaneous (μοῦνον εἰσιδοῦσ' ἆφαρ 958; note especially the aorist participle). Despite their fear, however, the Chorus does not flee, but hopes for an impossible occurrence to save them from the sight of Heracles (εἴθ' . . . γένοιτ' . . . αὖρα 953-954). Like the Nurse, who rather than restrain Deianeira hid and watched her, the Chorus wishes to behold the sight it rhetorically deplores.

When Heracles does arrive, however, the Chorus, far from being struck dead, cannot tell by looking whether he is dead or only asleep (969-970). Whatever physical injury Heracles has sustained is not visible, since he is covered (cf. 1078). Only the silence of Heracles (ἀναύδατος 968) and his bearers (ἄψοφον . . . βάσιν 967) indicates the seriousness of Heracles' condition. Thus the Chorus' expectation of presence is disappointed; even without speech, the sign of silence mediates their knowledge of Heracles' condition.

Hermeneutic Commentaries

Pietro Pucci
General Editor

Vol. 1

PETER LANG
New York • Bern • Frankfurt am Main • Paris

Bruce Heiden

Tragic Rhetoric

An Interpretation of Sophocles' *Trachiniae*

1989

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